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VERSE FROM A WESTERN ISLE

FREDERIC PHILIPS

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BRITISH COLUMBIA

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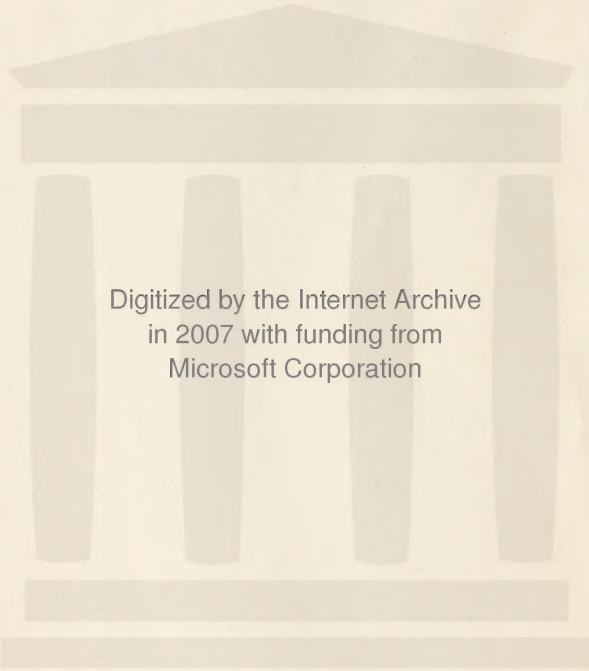
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1909



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Verse From a Western Isle

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1909
by Frederic Philips

*Dull minds dull days do make, and sunny thoughts
Will flood the dreariest landscape with delight.
Each makes his world, and, if he will,
Stands a creator, lord of good and ill.*

Victoria, B.C.:
Thos. R. Cusack, Printer
1909



Frontispiece]

THE LAKE

Verse From A Western Isle

By Frederic Philips

*I spoke as I saw.
I report, as a man may of God's work
—all's love, yet all's law.
—R. Browning.*

Thos. R. Cusack, Victoria, British Columbia

Price: 50 Cents

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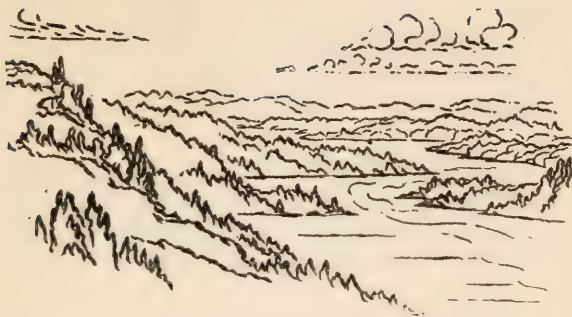
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To My Mother

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A WESTERN ISLE.

An Isle there is upon a western shore,
Yet sheltered from the ocean's rage and storm,
With many sister isles encompassed,
So that unknown is there the sea's dull roar.

Dark are its firwoods, steeped in golden light;
Clear are its bays, which scarce the winds may
kiss,
As singing o'er the heights with dying force,
Caught in the tree tops, here they end their flight.

Here Nature spills her joys with lavish care,
Making a summer under winter's frown,
As playful daughters tease their surly sires,
Taking rebuke with laughing, saucy, air.

Here the sun's fiercest ray so tempered is
 With soft, cool breezes from the placid wave,
 Or filtered through the boughs of orchard trees,
That none may take his heat and power amiss.

Here man may dwell and reap the grateful fruits
 Of pleasant toil that strengthens and rewards.
 The night to sleep, the dawn invites to rise
And labour as the varied season suits.

Fish, flesh, and fowl, the hills and lakes provide;
 The hunter heavy with their spoil may turn,
 His goal some simple orchard-hidden home;
Nor will the sea his angling skill deride.

And many waters mirror heaven's face,
 And one may wander far in forest isles
 Where the tree-columns bear the fretted roof,
And now in shadow, now in light may pace.

Till climbing upward reach some jutting peak,
 And view the world in sabbath stillness steeped,
 And listen for the singing of the winds
That wander ever round in restless freak.

The sea and land inextricably mixed,
 The dark grey forest and the glancing wave,
 A world of joy and sorrow here displayed,
And type of that wherein our steps are fixed.

OCTOBER.

A pale blue haze, a bright October day,
And hills that stab the blue with jagged pines.
The sky with fishbone clouds in disarray,
And fleecy vapours trailing silky lines.

Far down, a little lake of answering blue,
With verdant meadows circling all around.
A homestead nestling almost out of view
Midst orchards yellow-leaved that hide the ground.

And all about the forest stretches dark
With pines that point to heaven with varied spire,
But here and there the roving eye may mark
A maple or a dogwood touched with fire.

With fire that all the long hot summer days
The glossy leaves, it seems, did store for gain,
Till finding that the sun had turned his ways,
They'd lengthen them by flinging back again.

A gaunt sepulchral figure rears its head
With arms all rigid o'er the piny waste;
A monarch tree but waiting Boreas' tread
To bring him to what all at last shall taste.

A craggy steep here towers o'er the scene,
With trees and boulders mingled on the slope,
And pines go trooping down the rocks between,
And pines come trooping up with those to cope.

The prim arbutus, with her smooth, red, stem,
Leans poised upon an overhanging ledge,
And sturdy oaks stand sentinel to them
That crowd in serried ranks and matted hedge.

Here on the summit is a fairy lawn
Of emerald and saffron mosses soft,
With dainty threads that bear the hues of dawn
O'erspread, while others sink or float aloft.

And where the grey rock pushes from the moss
The lichens spread and cling with warm soft tints;
And here a grass-tuft doth the space emboss,
And there a stunted pine flings silvery glints.

The tiny insects in the slumberous air
Do rise and fall and aimless come and go.
The red deer coughs a welcome from his lair,
And sheep-bells tinkle from the rocks below.

THE LAKE.

A purple cloud broods o'er the evening scene,
Broken like wool, it hardly hides the sky,
And seems to tell that Summer now is gone
And Autumn here with all her motley train.
The lake, complacent, like a city wife,
Mirrors the season's mood, and now doth shew
The yellowing lily leaves among the green,
The tall reeds bending to the lingering airs,
The fallen tree-trunk sloping from the flood,
Decked with a grass-tuft of a green so fresh
Spring must have dropped it from her verdant skirt
To give men hope in this now dying world;
The cedar drear with orange tassels hung,
The sumach bush that sets the lake aglow,
The graceful alder, silver-stemmed, that bends
Towards the lake her mirrored self to view,
Backed by the haughty pine her guardian stern,
Sombre and straight he stands, as well prepared
For all the gales and buffets fate shall bring.

A double fringe of green and russet shews
 Circling the lake. Substance and shadow. Reed
 Or reflection. Each must pass away.
 The flood alone remains where all things tend.

Hark, that small song!
 The reed-wren pipes his lay.
 Cheery he dwells,
 Nor bodes he that dark day
 When icy Winter's blast
 Shall bid all nature stay.

See where the mere-hen by yon golden cup,
 A 'lated lily lingering last alone,
 With furtive glance sinks to the head, and now
 A circling eddy leaves, as when some trout
 With dainty care sucks down the careless gnat.
 With plashes now the small trout stir the lake,
 First to the feast, they eager are to snatch
 And taste each fly, ere the great fish shall wake
 With lightning rush, and many a sullen swirl,
 To drive them from their delicate sweet food.

The pied ducks skim the lake with feverish wing,
 And now, from fern-clad slopes of tawny hue
 That rise to meet the cool, grey, mossy rock,
 The stately pheasant flings his double note
 In bold defiance to the listening air,
 And blue-jays chatter as they haunt the wood.

AUTUMN.

O Nature, loveliest in thy Autumn mood!
Nor Winter's ringing laugh and fairy spray,
Nor Spring's coquetting hours and roundelay,
Nor Summer's hushed and long and languorous day,
 Has half thy charm,
 When, void of harm,
Thy sun's rays softly pour on lake and wood.

Thou dost not tease us now as in thy Spring,
When chill winds battle with the sun's pale ray,
And timorous blooms peep out in sad dismay,
And month-old lambs droop spiritless for play,
 And still the snow
 Seems loth to go,
But tosses back what warmth the sunbeams bring.

Not now the dust and sultry Summer sun,
 When panting flocks at night alone may eat,
 And seek by day some airy, cool retreat;
 When cattle lash their flanks with rhythmic beat,
 And all day long
 With throbbing song
 The strumming insects bid the hours run.

But now thy love doth compass all our bliss,
 And we do live in an enchanted land
 Where richest colours glow on every hand
 In softest harmonies at thy command;
 And thou dost bless
 With soft caress
 As mothers trembling, sleeping babes do kiss.

Who doth not love thy warm, contentful days?
 Days like deep notes from some enchanted flute,
 When man should listen, grateful, happy, mute,
 Nor vex the air with querulous dispute,
 But peaceful dwell,
 And from thy well
 Of love and bounty purify his ways.

The maples blaze like gold amid the pines,
The hills are decked in orange-tawny suit,
And 'midst those orchards far from city bruit
We linger as we pluck the latest fruit.

The sunbeams sink
On fields that drink
And glow, till evening mist their joy confines.



THE PASSING OF THE FIR.

The blue-grouse are feeding among the sallal,
And the willow-grouse dust in the sun.

The deer roam at leisure,
And squirrels take pleasure
In chasing each other in fun.

There's no fear in the woods though the Autumn has
come,

And Nature provides enough food and a home
For her children beneath the tall firs.

But hark! a new sound has come into the land,
And the woodpecker stops in his work.

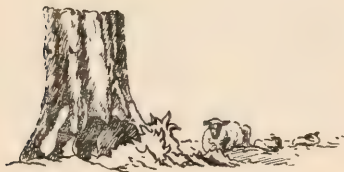
Blows by one stronger than he,
Blows that will bring down a tree,

When the axe gleams, and rings on the trunk.
There's no peace in the woods where the settler has
come,

He must kill and destroy for his life and a home,
And make war on the ranks of the firs.

Black lie the trees, of their glories all stripped,
And the Earth has a mantle of ash.
Fire has swept over the land,
Fire that destroyed at command,
When the steel had swept down the tall trees.
There is peace where they stood, but the peace of the
dead.
What shall grow from the ashes, and stand in their
stead,
With a beauty like that of the firs?

In September the sun shot his rays o'er the land,
They were caught by the globes of the dew.
Dew-drops that hung on the blade
Flashed into light from the shade,
Where the Earth was a shimmer of green.
There's new life in the land that was swept by the fire,
And meadows and orchards, the settler's desire,
Shall be where once stood the tall firs.



SNOW.

When Winter takes his wizard's wand
And stills all Nature to his hand
 With his pure canopy,
The whispering needles of the fir
Are hushed, and ends their summer's air.

Each tiny twig of every tree,
Amazed, stands out in mystery
 Of interlaced light.
Uncertain what this touch portends,
The gelid sap its motion ends.

The crouching earth forlorn doth lie,
As fowl, the eagle in the sky,
 Or child bereft of mate.
The wren will scarce forsake his tree
To wonder what the silence be.

But not for long can Nature stay,
Or give to Winter all his way,
 'Tis not the way of love.
The winds come whistling up amain
And all the forest laughs again.

DECEMBER.

When all the world is wrapped in bitter fog,
 And icy Winter clasps the brimming lake,
 And mallard circle plaintive o'er the bog,
 And must forsooth them to the sea betake.
 When pheasants creep amid the fern,
 And noon to clammy eve doth turn,
 Then heap the bark upon the fire
 And let the flame mount higher and higher,
 And may we bide,
 Whate'er betide,
 Right merry round the hearth with song at
 Christmastide.

When sheep fling showers from their spangled wool,
 And fowls crowd moping 'neath the orchard fence,
 And children blue-cheeked hurry home from school
 To watch their breath on window-pane condense.
 When apples, rosy-cheeked, invite
 Both old and young to take a bite,
 Gather we round the ruddy glow,
 And think how those at Home do know
 That we who stand
 On distant strand
 Send hearts and hopes across the sea to Motherland.

A CHRISTMAS FROST.

Now Winter, shake thy hoary hand,
And sow with snow the frozen land,
That soon it may revive,
And warm beneath thy mantle white
The tender blade, all out of sight,
Shall wait the Spring to give delight
To creatures all that live.

And while we wait with patient eye
For yellow crocus presently,
The jewel of the Spring,
We'll laugh at all thy rugged ways,
And heap the fire in roaring blaze,
And mark with glee the lengthening days,
And cheer thee on the wing.

And when thy blast doth shriek and roar,
And batters at the bolted door,
 And shakes the window panes;
We'll take the floor with nimble feet,
And mark a measure swift and neat,
And lassies rosy-cheeked and sweet
 Shall curtsey to their swains.

Then let the greeting circle round,
And rich and poor in love abound.
 A Merry Christmas now!
We're flung abroad through all the earth,
But ever round an English hearth
They think the year is nothing worth
 Till Christmas crown the plow.

WINTER.

Now Winter lords it o'er the land.

Bow the neck! Bow the neck!

King is he of mighty wand

Bow the neck!

All around his mantle drear

Swathes in white the new-born year.

Bow the neck!

He hath bound the waters fast.

Whipped the forest with his blast.

Bow the neck!

But the sap he cannot quell.

Far to seek

Shall he be when blade and bell

Peer and peek.

VICTORIA, BRITISH COLUMBIA.

Low-lying City by the rock-bound shore,
Lapped by the pearly-clear Pacific wave.
Bound of our Empire, where what lies before
Invites the merchant and allures the brave.

Here, where the rushing west-bound tide must stay,
Or surging further reach the languorous "East,"
Here, where the worker must confine his way,
Or venturing on shall sink among the least.

Wandering, I pause to mark thy wind-swept lands,
Smiling and verdant in the winter sun,
With oak and fir, here singly, here in bands,
Warped by the gales that round the years do run.

Here, where the red rose decks December's day,
Here, where the house walls bright with berries
glow,
Here could I loiter, turning from the way
Of Fortune calling to the northern snow.

Oft have I gazed across the narrow sea,
 Where rugged mountains rear their grisly heads,
 And snow-peaks, ranged in chilling majesty,
 Shew where the earth the cloudy heaven weds;

Or when with coiling vapours all is hid,
 A sudden rent admits the sinking ray,
 Some mighty peak, all blushing, in the mid
 Of heaven appears, and fades as soon away:

And when the sun hangs low, and breakers crowd,
 Leaping like hounds upon a stag at bay,
 Flung howling from his antlers held low-browed,
 Yet still come hurtling on against their prey;

Then like a grotto green each wave uprears,
 With snowy roof and sunbeams filtering through,
 Shattering amidst the wrack. So do the years
 With memories Time's crumbling shore bestrew.



THE KLONDIKE.

Hoho! hoho! for the glittering North,
With her gold, and ice, and snow;
She calls to the sons of men "Come forth!"
And quick to her call they go.

The East and the West have heard her call;
They shall gain them toil and pain,
But they come in haste from hut and hall,
And isles of the Southern main.

"Leave farm and counter and office stool,
And Love shall my handmaid be;
I claim ye all, be ye knave or fool,
And the eld shall come to me.

From lonely homestead amid the pines,
From southern orchards warm,
From plains where the cattle stream in lines,
And lands where white sheep swarm,

From factory's hum, and workshop's toil,
From the city's dreadful glare,
Come! seek me out in my grisly foil,
And my cold and gold all share.

Ye shall clutch my gold with starving grasp,
Ye shall sink in smothering gale,
I will hold ye close in icy clasp
Where the wolf shall mock thy wail.

Then climb the mountain, and wade the swamp,
And stem the foaming stream,
But toll ye shall pay from every camp
Where they dream the miner's dream."

Hoho! hoho! for the glistening North!
With her gold that is locked in ice;
She calls to the sons of men "Come forth!
Come! buy my gold at a price."

THE GOLD CREEK.

A roar of rushing waters falls upon the startled ear ;
Ceaseless roar of restless waters, pushing, clutching,
like a fear
That at midnight in the darkness grips the heart we
know not why,
And we shiver, helpless, hopeless, drawn to that we
long to fly.
Hear the song of rushing waters, tumbling, foaming
o'er the rocks,
Never murmuring, never halting, fiercely borne by
passion shocks
From the snowfields on the mountains, aiming for
the Arctic sea,
Hasting, striving, cruel, relentless, bearing down
humanity.

“Gold is hid, my current guards it.
Dig, and keep my waters back.
Find the spot where it lies thickest
Let thy striving never slack.
Straining hand and eye to win it,
Fearful of my whelming flood,
Watch my swelling, turbid waters,
Feel thy ever thinning blood.

Won with pain, then quickly fling it,
Fling it in a muddier stream,
Stream of riot, drink and folly,
Mingled in a palsied dream.
Barter it for fleeting frenzy,
Let it fire thy pallid veins,
Knowing well my spell is on thee,
Back thou must for further gains.

So my waters, tumbling, tossing, racing for the
Arctic sea,
Carry thee and all thy longings onward to Eternity.”

THE DECK-HAND.

We plow our meadow, the green, flecked sea,
With purple shades, like a summer lea,
We plow and we reap right merrily,
And strew our bones on the white-flecked sea.

What do we reap from the land-locked sea
We plow together unceasingly?
Bread, and breath, and a grave maybe.
What does it matter? We sail the sea.

Our work's in port, but we sail the sea.
Though we reef no sail, we are seamen, we.
We can stow the freight so handily,
And we're quick with a line when we put to sea.

We know our way in the tide-swept sea,
By shore-line dark with the tall fir-tree.
When the winds and tide fight knee to knee,
We live through all as we ride the sea.

Our wake unrolls on the cold grey sea,
The seagull swoops by the dark green tree,
Grey is the sky, and the scud flies free,
We follow, we follow, where leads the sea.

This is our home, the glancing sea,
And the land that holds it, we hold as free.
Sons of a breed that won the sea,
Come wind or storm, we must rule the sea.



THE COLONIES TO ENGLAND.

In days when famine gripped the land,
 And corn was scarce, and bread was black,
Thy sea dogs coursed from strand to strand,
 Thy Empire rose from battle-wrack.

The sword was sheathed, thy way was won ;
 To keep the law the scabbard serves.
Our emblem is the rising sun,
 Our brawn and brain are thy reserves.

We hold the outposts of the Earth,
 We dwell with Nature undismayed.
'Tis home where'er we build our hearth,
 And by our hand the thread is laid,

The thread that binds us to those Isles,
 Dim-lying in the yeasty seas,
Whose memories of tears and smiles
 Come crowding in our hours of ease.

No land so drear but held some good,
 No seas but split upon our keel,
 And startled Nature shuddering stood,
 And forests knew the biting steel.

The sword became a plowshare soon,
 The prairie took a newer green,
 And mellowing on from yearly noon
 A laughing harvest soon was seen.

The sheaves we bound for thee were meant,
 The golden grain thy ships did fill;
 And gold came back and brought content
 And confidence to nerve our will.

And that we've done we'll do again,
 And reap a harvest sevenfold;
 Let Britons thrive on British grain,
 And spending, still retain their gold.

We love thy laws, benign and just.
 Fear not without, but watch within.
 No foe shall dare. Thy guns may rust
 If greed, and greed alone is sin.

The Nations watch in awe and fear.
 God's peace shall rest on all thy Lands.
 Thy wayward Daughter shall draw near,
 Demand her place among thy Bands.

To thee we look. Thy statesman breed
Is virile yet, and knows the times
When shattering forces may be freed,
And guided home from sundered climes.

Still young, we need the gentle hand.
Impatient at the boundless view
We leave discretion on the strand,
And sail on seas of treacherous hue;

Or busied with the daily toil,
We give the wordy placeman place,
And learn at last the curious coil
Of laws that lawless men enlace.

We dare not loose the guiding hand,
The watchful eye, the jealous care,
The nurture of the Motherland
That guards, and bids the world beware!

A. D. 1897.

Peace lulls the land the restless sea surrounds,
Low moan the waves that lap our varied bounds,
And o'er the watery waste the word resounds,
 Friends all, the word is Peace!

Far down the vista of internal strife,
Dark with the clouds that shrouded England's life,
When war was pastime, wilful rapine rife,
 Strange to the land was peace.

But ever, as when storm-clouds course the sky
Some little rift of blue we may espy,
A quietful pause rejoiced the thoughtful eye
 At times, and breathed of peace.

So Alfred turned the Nation's mind to lore;
 And conquering William welded what before
 Joined but in strife; and the last Henry bore
 The torch that lights to peace.

And great Elizabeth with kindling eye
 Fired all the heroes of the land to die
 Or venture win, that at her feet might lie
 Fame, honour, conquests, peace.

The influence of the great can never die,
 But lives to nourish those that presently
 Shall carry on that scheme unwittingly
 That leads to certain Peace.

Else man among the brutes his place should take,
 Who but to instinct, not to reason wake.
 For tales of heroes told do heroes make,
 Conquering endurance, peace.

The centuries reap the sowing of the years,
 And where men fought, and women shed hot tears,
 It was that children might not know their fears,
 But walk abroad in peace.

And now our merchant ships explore the seas,
 Fearless of foe, and use or stem the breeze,
 And flag floats out to flag in well-known keys,
 Is England still at peace?

And she who rules in peace with clasped hands,
Watching her people grow to countless bands,
Labouring, exploring, planting in new lands,
Empress and Queen of Peace!

She shall be greatest in that noble line
That guideth England 'neath the Hand divine,
Gathering the threads and weaving garment fine,
Binding our Lands in peace.

And still the signal flashes o'er the wave,
Friends all, the word is Peace!

DAWN.

Dawn! Dawn! And shall the day bring joy or woe?
Shall radiant hopes melt into deathless blue or
sullen grey?

Dawn! And the robin's pipe sounds clear and low;
The call to duty cometh with the day.

Dawn! Dawn! The watcher by the bed of pain
Welcomes with weary eyes the flushing light that
dims the lamp.

Another day may mean a year or twain
Of love spun out ere whelmed in graveyard-damp.

Dawn! Dawn! The slayer of his fellow man
Convicted, waits his wasted life to render on Time's
shore.

Life that is taken, being but a span,
Must go with life its God to stand before.

Dawn! Dawn! And still the revel holds its sway.
 "Shut out the sun! Cold is the light upon the fevered
 brow.

Why should we pause, or seek the garish day?
 Fill up the cup. Pleasure o'erlords it now."

Dawn! Dawn! The owl's to roost. The bat hath
 fled.

The wolf hath slunk as some dim shadow to his
 thicket lair.

The daisy opes to sunbeams barely sped,
 And life is thrilling in the lambent air.

Dawn! Dawn! The day is ours to mar or win;
 To mark with gracious deed, or coward shrinking
 from the right.

Now is our battle-time with death and sin.
 The Day-spring presages eternal light.

Dawn! Dawn! We wait the coming lightning
 flash,
 When the dread Powers of darkness, suffered long,
 shall riven be,
 And flaming swords shall stream, and thunders
 crash,
 And Earth, left peaceful, lift her face to Thee.

NATURE. A FRAGMENT.

O Love, that lasteth but a summer's day!
O Fortune, fleeting as the morning dew!
O Fate, that snatcheth every joy away,
And leaves us naught but Nature's face to view!
Fate, Fortune, Love, may flout us at their will,
But Nature's face turns kindly on us still.

Whoever fled from man's most baleful look,
Whoever turned from woman's careless flout,
But found in Nature, as an open book,
Balm for his wounds, and solace for his doubt.
Mankind unkind breeds hate in his own kind,
Who turns to Nature, only love shall find.

When gentle winds come whispering o'er the wave,
Or through the fir-tops sigh in softest key;
When clarion storm-trumps split the vaulty cave
Of cloud that circumscribes the rain-swept sea;
In this or that, I see but Nature's mood,
In storm or sunshine, working for our good.

Who courts mankind must follow devious ways,
 Approach by sapping, or win out by lure;
 And who would rule, with care must spend his days,
 And of the morrow can be never sure;
 But who with Nature dwells may rest at ease,
 The morrow will unfold new joys to please.

Nature is ever ready to be wooed;
 Give but a searching glance and she will come,
 And all her store will at thy feet unload
 And make thee welcome to her world-wide home.
 Unfold her riches in her tireless way,
 And make a lifetime but a happy day.

For, who has watched the circling seasons turn
 By some quiet lake set in a forest land,
 Has seen the tints of spring, or hills that burn
 With autumn colours blended by her hand,
 And did not feel that here with Nature life
 Were better far than caught in human strife?

The misty curtains of the silent morn
 Cling to the water, or with ragged edge
 Drag slowly, by the bristling fir trees torn,
 Along some vague and towering rocky ledge;
 And shadowy shapes of mountains wait the day
 To gild their summits with his sunbeams' play.

See, when the sun, his summer course outrun,
Sinks like a prodigal to cold decline,
His ardour spent and all his power done,
His bosom friends the forests do combine
With yellow, orange, purple past compare,
To fling a golden radiance to the air.

The smiling hills prolong the summer days
And give their all to cheer the waning year;
As they their verdure opened to his rays,
So when the sun declines, their part they bear;
Spread their gay robes in fervour to the day
Till winter strips them in his boisterous play.

O cruel Winter! Husband to the Spring,
Who would detain her in his icy cave,
But she, hot rebel, wills their boy to bring,
Brave Summer, to a world she still can save.
Who sports and plays, and drowsy, climbs the steep,
And Winter steals upon him in his sleep.

TO CAPRICIA.

One time I loved to dwell by lonely lakes
And in their face view heaven's reflected ray,
And watch the varied tints that Nature takes
To deck her world, and mark the Season's day;
But heaven's depths dwell in those lakes thine eyes,
And all the Seasons' charms thyself comprise.

Thou art like Spring, for thou a bud dost live.
Lovely, unfolding to a lovelier bloom;
And Summer's blessing sure those lips can give,
Ripening rank slavery to a harvest home.
If Autumn lost her cunning, she could take
Gold from thy hair, her world more bright to make.

Winter's dank days are not more darkly drear
Than hours when thou indifferent dost seem.
Hail doth not sting, or northern blast breed fear
As thy cold word, quenching pale Hope his gleam.
Yet, as the Seasons three to one do stand
For blessings, I would gladly take thy hand.

And in the Spring we'd wander where the boughs,
Their petals loosened by a robin, bold
With his new love-trills, scatter their sweet snows,
Playing at winter with thy autumn gold ;
And lilies and the daisies of old home
Should kiss thy feet and bid thee glad welcome.

In Summer, Summer's days were all too short
To gather all the sweetness from the bloom
That flames upon the tree where thorns do court
The eager embrace seeking other doom ;
In Summer time but living is delight,
Draining each moment in its instant flight.

When Autumn came, ah then, when Autumn came,
Great-bosomed Autumn of the auburn hair,
Whose ardent trappings echo passion's flame,
Veiled in the mystery of the azure air ;
In those rich days that linger while the sun
Beckons them southward ere the year is done,

And in those orchards where the robins sang,
All silent now, for parting brooks no song,
Where petals fell, and golden apples hang
Waiting the severance of their sweet life's thong.
There may we watch with joy untouched by fear
The glorious pageant of the closing year.

Winter shall come, the trial of the days,
When all the profit of the hours is weighed,
And they who humbly trod in Nature's ways
Behold her gifts in crammed store displayed.
We who in farming love the minutes spent
Shall face the dark days with a sure content.

THE BROOK.

A brook set out from its mountain home
 Patting the pebbles "Good-bye, good-bye.
You must stay, but I shall roam;
 The world is there and I choose my way."

Bright and gay were the mountain slopes;
 Here to wander is utter joy.
This the present and bubbling hopes
 Make the course but a golden way.

Rocks were there but it slipped around,
 Turned to laugh ere it babbled on.
Leaped at flowers its margin crowned,
 Cheered itself with a shallow song.

Forcing a way through the valley loam,
Little recked of the guiding banks.
Proudly carried a crest of foam
Over a fall with a kingly crash.

Spread itself on a boundless plain ;
To find a channel was weary work.
Silent now with a deep disdain
Of slimy banks and the cloying dirt.

Swirled and sobbed in a navy's lash,
Tried to smile in a city's glare,
Stupified with a factory's wash,
Checked and frayed by many a pier.

Palsied now with the ebb and flow,
Choked and baffled, but ever free
In thoughts of mountain and melting snow,
Slipped one day to the silent sea.

THE PIONEER IN TOWN.

Yes, I may envy them their trim-kept lawns,
Their hollyhocks that proudly line the walks,
And roses trailing up the balcony,
All in the English style.
And twirling water in a diamond spray,
To keep the grass green through the drougthy days.

These townsmen have a knack of smug content.

But they can never drink the wine of life,
To tramp all day in endless forest glades,
Where sunshine comes in showers to refresh
The parched gloom of countless evergreens,
Or trace the piercing spire of some tall fir
Up to the zenith. Or at noon to lie
Beneath a cedar whose vast hollow bole
Would take ten men to circle.

Then at night,
The dreamy camp-fire's flicker dying down,
The burning stars draw near, and you can feel
The Universe is round you—made for you.
You rise at dawn to take your heritage.

Bathed in the autumn sunshine, once I sat
Upon a mountain side and looked across
A sea of settled vapour far below,
Whence other hills like islands thrust their heads.
It seemed impossible that men should dwell
Down under all that writhing, seething mass;
And yet I knew that towns and fields were there,
And struggling creatures, gasping out their lives.

No kingdom like a clearing in the woods.
The blue smoke curling from the burning logs,
And smell of smouldering alder, new turned earth.
Incense to offer to the Lord of all.
There one is king indeed. Not ruling men—
That implies servitude on someone's part,
And servitude debases him who's served—
But guiding Nature's force, turning her laws
Into your channels. That indeed's to rule.

THE DESERTED RANCH.

I see the logs that lie in disarray,
Grey records of an effort unfulfilled,
Where man o'erweening in his little day
Would quickly reap what Nature slowly tilled.
Pitting his puny strength in feverish mood
Against the passive pillars of the wood.

They lie like bones of giants along the plain,
Scattered and seared, and blackened by the fire,
That in some struggle fell and here have lain
Calling for sepulchre or funeral pyre.
How great the spirit that inspired the arm
That marked these foes and smote them to their harm!

The cabin stands with gaping, shattered, door,
 That nevermore shall shut on warmth within.
 Moss grows on roof, leaves drift upon the floor,
 And staring chinks let every cold air in,
 So that the shivering leaves do sigh and roam
 Like ghosts of children mourning for their home.

Who was he, that with hopes at highest flood,
 First made the woods resound with ringing blows?
 Who all day swung the axe, and bade the blood
 Leap through his veins and scorn the wintry snows.
 Knew he some home beyond the rocking seas,
 And here had thought from toil to build an ease?

Came he in winter when the still white woods
 Glitter like silver in the steely air?
 Choosing this spot to place his worldly goods,
 And pierced the ground and thought the prospect fair;
 Stretching a canvas o'er the notched tree,
 And called it Home, rejoicing to be free.

Glad to renew each morn the heavy strife
 Where every act creates a train of toil
 Reaching beyond the compass of a life
 Spent in the effort to subdue the soil.
 Glad to endure with no complaining voice
 Looking to bliss with helpmate of his choice.

Perhaps beneath the sun's meridian ray
He led her wondering to this battlefield,
Through bitter smoke to pick a stumbling way
Where fallen trees would scarce a pathway yield;
When forest fires invade the woods' retreat,
Veiling the sun, to make a fiercer heat.

'Twas here they stood and saw the future fields
In sweet imagination spread around,
The years unrolling offering all their yields
Of fruitful blessings of the sacred ground.
'Twas here they strove and hoped, and strove at last
Till all their hopes were buried in the past.



HOPE.

The shortest day has come and gone,
And Nature in her sterner mood
Has stripped the trees, as nothing good,
And broods, and all the world's forlorn.

If Hope had fled with summer days,
And Faith had faded with the leaves,
Our poor stark souls must surely freeze
Ere came the sun's reviving rays.

HOME.

Where kindly looks, and gentle ways,
And Music, heavenly maid, abides.
There would I pass my earthly days,
Nor seek for other rest besides.

Where grace and sweetness have their home,
And beauty cannot choose but stay,
'Twere foolishness to further roam,
Or spend in wandering life's short day.

LIFE.

Man is but a voyager
Upon the sea Eternity.
Urged onward by an unseen force
He cometh to a strip of land,
And hurrying o'er rock and sand,
And jagged stones, and flowers with thorns,
Calls querying to those at hand,
And whispers "Whither go we now,
And wilt thou now remain by me,
Or shall we soon be torn apart?
O stay! see! here be daisies bright,
And springing grass, and gentle airs.
'Tis warmer now. Why must we go?
Ah! now the air strikes chill again.
On! on! There must be something there.
Why do they strive, and strain, and seek?
Is it for rest, oblivion,
Or do they hope from wind to hide,
Or look for shadow wearily,
Or peace, or love, and what are they?"

NIGHT.

Lo! gentle Night, who weeps at all our toil,
Withdraws reluctant at the dawn's chill breath,
Leaving her darling Earth with tears bedewed,
And ere the sun his thirsty rays shall fling
To rob us of her sweet refreshing boon,
Slips sobbing o'er the wakening western hills.



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Verse from a western
isle.

T. R. Cusack
([1909])

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